

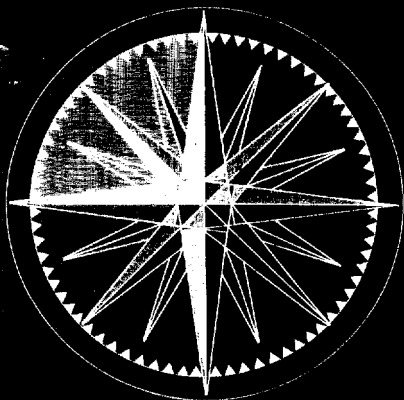
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SPECIAL REPORT

OFFICE OF CURRENT INTELLIGENCE

DIVIDED LEADERSHIP IN INDIA'S DEFENSE EFFORT

CENTRAL INTELLIGENCE AGENCY

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DIVIDED LEADERSHIP IN INDIA'S DEFENSE EFFORT

The management of India's booming defense establishment is not going well. As requirements and problems have multiplied during the five months since Krishna Menon's dismissal as defense chief, executive control has been dispersed and weakened, and conflicts in authority among key officials directing the defense build-up are growing. Economic and Defense Coordination Minister T. T. Krishnamachari, who will visit Washington beginning 6 May, is one of six civilian officials operating at the cabinet level who exercise some measure of authority in this field. The least influential of them may well be the defense minister himself, Y. B. Chavan. At least three military and intelligence service chiefs also have an important say in defense policy. The damaging effects of divided leadership and political rivalry are already being felt, and if uncorrected the conditions could seriously delay and disrupt the defense build-up.

Menon's Defense Ministry

From 1957 to late 1962 the defense field was Krishna Menon's exclusive domain. Although Menon was subject to continuing criticism and opposition from within the government, his control over a wide range of defense matters was never challenged. Prime Minister Nehru, who took little interest in this field, apparently was content to give Menon a free hand, and delegated more responsibility to him than to any other minister.

Following the debacle on the Sino-Indian frontier in November, Nehru attempted to salvage Menon's position by appointing him to a new ministry of defense production, but finally let him go when this demotion failed to satisfy the pressure for Menon's removal

from the cabinet. Menon's departure thus created a void in an area of the government which was taking on great political importance. The new opportunities for political gain in the defense field were clear to the men around Nehru, and the rush to fill the vacuum did not end with the appointment of Chavan as defense minister.

Chavan

Chavan came to the central government from Bombay, where he had earned a formidable reputation for administrative ability and political skill as chief minister of Maharashtra State. Although little known outside the Bombay region, Chavan often had been touted as the most promising of the younger generation of political leaders and as a possible contender for the prime-ministership.

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CHAVAN

Despite his acknowledged abilities, Chavan has had trouble moving into the big league. He has found the process of gaining control over Menon's ministry and earning the respect of the independent-minded civil and military officers under his command to be a slow and difficult one. His performance in Parliament, on which his political rating will be based, has been generally unimpressive to date--at times faltering.

Chavan's lack of expertise in a complex field and his provincial background may contribute to his apparent ineffectiveness. However, he reportedly attributes his difficulties--probably with good cause--to two bigger problems: Nehru, and the activities of several politicians gunning for the defense minister's job.

In naming Chavan as Menon's replacement, Nehru went along with the suggestion of various Congress Party leaders; apparently it was not a personal choice. The relationship between Nehru and Chavan had been limited and somewhat distant, and does not appear to have improved since Chavan's arrival in New Delhi. Nehru, smarting over the Menon affair, probably also resented the foreign and domestic press speculation about Chavan's chances as a future prime minister.

Moreover, the barrage of criticism directed against Nehru personally last fall, and the continued questioning of his leadership, probably has given the aging Indian leader some concern about his own power position. As a result, he now may be more inclined to check any threat to his control by limiting the power of individual ministers and playing off one contender against another.

In any case, the scope of the present defense minister's responsibility has narrowed, with some of his former duties and a number of important new functions distributed among other ministers and advisers. Chavan's role has been reduced largely to one of administration. In some major policy decisions affecting national security and in certain sensitive operations closely related to the defense effort, he appears to figure

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only indirectly--if at all. On such matters, Nehru seems more inclined to turn to other ministers or confidants than to Chavan. Among these are two officials whom he has assigned specific responsibilities in the defense field, Krishnamachari and Bijoyananda Patnaik.

Krishnamachari

Under his somewhat vague mandate of "coordinating" the economic development and defense efforts, Krishnamachari has taken charge of the expanding defense production program, even though ordnance factories remain under the Defense Ministry's jurisdiction. A businessman politician and senior minister from 1952 to 1958, Krishnamachari was brought back into the cabinet in his former fifth-ranking position last summer. TTK, as he is widely known, is on good terms with Nehru, being an admiring friend of long standing and a firm supporter of his policies. Nehru probably felt that Krishnamachari's influence would help offset growing conservative sentiment in the cabinet, and that his broad experience and forcefulness were what was needed to clear away the bottlenecks preventing faster economic growth.

Krishnamachari clearly takes a broad view of his responsibilities. His interests extend well beyond industrial



KRISHNAMACHARI

output, and he may be maneuvering to take over the defense portfolio in addition to his role as production czar. His trip to the US was planned originally as a follow-up to the recent American defense production team's study in India, but it has been expanded into a full-fledged military aid mission authorized to negotiate air defense arrangements and arms aid across the board. A representative team of senior officials from Krishnamachari's and Chavan's ministries has been conferring in Washington since 17 April to prepare the way for what Indians widely regard as Krishnamachari's "final" negotiations.

Patnaik

Patnaik plays his role off stage, but in terms of impact on Nehru it seems no less important

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than those of Krishnamachari and Chavan. Patnaik apparently has not needed a cabinet portfolio to establish himself as a principal assistant to Nehru in the defense field.

Officially, he remains chief minister of Orissa State and functions merely as an "adviser" with no formal status in the central government. Actually, he spends most of his time in New Delhi and appears to have assumed the planning and "special project" responsibility of the defense minister. In contrast to Chavan, who operates somewhat at a distance from Nehru, Patnaik works out of the External Affairs Ministry in an office next to the prime minister's. His descriptions of his assignment as "the PM's overseer of the defense effort" probably is a characteristic exaggeration, but may not be too far from the mark.



PATNAIK

A highly controversial politician and flamboyant industrialist, Patnaik has special qualifications in the aviation field and in guerrilla operations dating back to his wartime experience as a pilot. Nehru was convinced that a lack of professional expertise contributed to the military failures last fall and that his government had to draw on such talent wherever it could be found. By December, Patnaik apparently had convinced Nehru that he not only knew what he was talking about but had the imagination and executive know-how to get things done quickly. Nehru's confidence in him may have been bolstered by Patnaik's past association with the "progressive" wing of the Congress Party and his close working relations with Indira Gandhi, Nehru's daughter and influential adviser.

Patnaik carried out a one-man mission to Washington in March. He apparently had authority from Nehru to sound out US officials on various possibilities for specialized military assistance. However, Patnaik's brief--like Krishnamachari's--actually took in a wide range of security questions. Because of the mysterious and unofficial nature of Patnaik's mission, and his propensity to talk too freely, there was a sharply adverse reaction in the Indian Parliament, where he could not be held accountable. As a result, his ambition to take formal charge of the Defense Ministry appears to have suffered a setback.

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Other Cabinet Voices

In addition to Nehru himself, two other senior ministers speak with authority on defense questions and sit on the cabinet's defense committee, Home Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri and Finance Minister Morarji Desai. Shastri, in his role as chief lieutenant and "alter ego" of Nehru, exercises what has been described as "overlordship" in this area by virtue of his seat on the key Emergency Subcommittee on Defense. Desai, who holds undisputed control over the budget and foreign exchange, plays an important part in major decisions on defense, since they nearly all involve large new expenditures.

Below cabinet level, there are several top service chiefs who share in the decision-making process and who retain considerable autonomy in their own bailiwicks. Notable among these are Gen. J. N. Chaudhuri, the ambitious new army chief of staff, and Air Marshal A. M. Engineer, air force chief of staff, whose influence carries more weight since Menon's departure.

Impact on Defense Build-up

The damaging effects of divided leadership and political rivalry in the defense program are already being felt. Reports

of rifts between the various ministries and personalities involved occur with growing frequency, suggesting the same pattern of administrative ills now plaguing the economic development program. Over the long run, these conditions could lead to serious delays and disruption in the defense build-up. Similarly, the problems faced by the US and other Western governments in supplying military assistance are likely to be multiplied by the number of Indian officials involved.

The present conflicts, like most in India, can be resolved only by Nehru. For the present, however, the prime minister seems either unwilling or unable to take the steps necessary to bring order into an increasingly confused situation.

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